



**Committee: UNODC**

**Topic: Finding innovative solutions against the expansion of synthetic stimulants**

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## INTRODUCTION

“The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a global leader in helping to make the world safer through its battle against drugs, organized crime, corruption, and terrorism for over two decades”.

The creation of UNODC was the product of the combined efforts of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme and the United Nations Center for International Crime Prevention in “1997”. It was created to allow the organization to center and increase its capacity to address the topics of drug control, terrorism, and crime in all their possible forms.

UNODC's “main objectives are to fight terrorism, strengthen crime prevention and build effective justice systems, address corruption and its effect on societies, strengthen the capacities of Member States to deal with organized crime, and support member States in implementing a comprehensive approach to drug control and supply-demand”. To achieve these objectives, UNODC assists its partners in applying and promoting various types of legislation, treaties, and other forms of legal texts aimed at curbing organized crime of various kinds.

Drugs that are created with man-made chemicals instead of natural ingredients are called synthetic stimulants or synthetic drugs. Synthetic drugs are focused on mimicking the effects of already existing illicit drugs. They contain different structures from these other illicit substances and their chemical structures are often being changed by the manufacturers to try and market them as “legal” and get ahead of the law. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean they are legal or safe in the first place. Most people aren't aware of what these kinds of drugs contain, since they are neither controlled nor regulated.

Synthetic drugs may also be known as bath salts, new and emerging drugs (NEDs), research chemicals, designer drugs, drug analogs, derivatives, etc.

The popularity of synthetic drugs has been increasing rapidly in the last few years. People seem to make the wrong assumption that these kinds of drugs are safe or might think they are naturally grown. These synthetic stimulants usually involve drugs never tested on humans, which may have serious consequences for users. Most people claim that synthetic drugs are safe because they are legal. In actuality, some countries are taking action in banning certain ingredients that could be found in drugs. The problem

resides in the fact that after these ingredients have been banned, manufacturers and drug designers will begin to use different and possibly even more dangerous chemicals. All these factors are what makes it difficult to eradicate this issue.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

The main point of synthetic drugs is to imitate the effects and feelings produced by natural drugs. When producing these substances, drug designers and manufacturers use a vast arrangement of chemicals to create those desired effects, most of which are extremely menacing. Some synthetic drugs have even been found containing ingredients such as rat poison. Adding the lack of regulations, the vast variety of these drugs in the market, and the somewhat easy accessibility, make it harder for professionals to predict what the ingredients of a particular batch will be.

Another risk involving these stimulants is that most of the ingredients have not been tested on humans or haven't fulfilled the necessary testing. Therefore, there isn't an actual way to know which specific effects or consequences a synthetic drug will have on a user, either in the long or short term. However, one thing is certain; These types of substances are proven to have detrimental and long-lasting effects on the human body, and more often than not, irreversible consequences on the brain.

When these varieties of stimulants first started emerging, government officials underestimated how dangerous they could be and how easy they could be acquired. Nowadays, synthetic stimulants are frequently found and sold in common places like clubs and are often offered cheaper than many alcoholic beverages. This, as a result, increases the attraction of young people, especially those with limited or lower financial resources. These drugs are also usually sold in many convenience stores, gas stations or on the Internet, and are often marketed as toilet salts, herbal incense, jewelry cleaner or investigational chemicals, etc., and labeled as "not safe for human consumption".

This is done to avoid being prosecuted or avoid regulation from government officials while also hiding its true intent from them. In consequence, synthetic stimulants are hard to regulate due to the manufacturers continuing to modify the chemicals and molecular structures of other controlled or illegal substances to avoid current drug laws and always staying one step ahead of government officials and the police. And unlike other drugs like heroin or cocaine, which can be restricted to only specific geographic locations, the manufacture of synthetic stimulants can be created and sold anywhere.

In some instances, it has been found that armed violence and illicit drug trading are heavily linked, especially in places like the Middle East and Latin America. This happens because, in contrast with natural drugs, when manufacturing synthetic

stimulants you don't need control over agricultural areas or force the local population to grow types of crops relating to drugs. Clandestine laboratories are smaller and easier to operate, and the chemicals needed to produce the drugs could be easily accessible if you hide the illicit reasons you need them for. Therefore, synthetic stimulants are a better source of income for these groups.

Around 27 million people used amphetamine stimulants (a type of synthetic drug) as of 2019. This number corresponds to 1 in 200 people in the global population. And apart from that, "20 million people worldwide are estimated to have used ecstasy in 2020".

The consequences and outcomes of synthetic stimulants can depend and vary on the drug type. However, it is known that the effects can be long-term, violent, and sometimes even deadly. Some of the most common symptoms that can present in someone who has consumed synthetic drugs include:

- Extreme anxiety
- Paranoia
- Seizures
- Delusions
- Aggression and violent behavior
- Nausea and vomiting
- Hallucinations
- Chest pains or heart attacks
- Loss of consciousness
- Depression in the long-term
- Suicidal or homicidal thoughts

Some of the most recent events that happened from 2021 were that synthetic stimulants were one of the biggest groups of newly emerging substances.

It was "a total of 48 new drugs were reported for the first time in UNODC's Early Warning System (EWA) on New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), as well as in 12 countries. Based on some of the data from the survey, the stimulants reported the biggest number of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) reported for the very first time worldwide, with more than 15 substances, followed by the 13 synthetic cannabinoid substances. Among the various groups, stimulants remain the biggest and most numerous group of all New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) reported to UNODC; the Early Warning System (EWA), with 381 unique substances between 2009 and 2021".

UNODC's "new report on the drug market in East and Southeast Asia has shown that COVID restrictions have failed to curb synthetic drug trafficking" in the above locations. With the further increase in drug trafficking in 2020.

“UNODC Regional Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Jeremy Douglas, mentions that existing drug smuggling by criminal groups has persisted, especially in the Upper Mekong and Shan State areas of Myanmar, keeping up their chemical drug supplies with ongoing border restrictions that have impacted cross-border trading”.

While the pandemic caused the economy to shrink, the production and trafficking of synthetic drugs have capitalized and been able to adapt quickly in the marketplace in several countries.

The increase in “methamphetamine” was from 170 tons of the drug in 2021 to 19% more than 142 tons in 2019. Simultaneously, there were major shifts in trafficking routes, with a large amount of the drug being trafficked through Lao PDR to Thailand and Vietnam”.

The problem in Southeast Asia regarding methamphetamine has been a serious issue, showing that the solutions that Asian countries have tried implementing are not enough to control this problem.

The expansion of methamphetamine is not the only fact to worry about; according to government notes, other problems are the increases in Ketamine and the amount of MDMA that have been found in some pills of ecstasy, which can cause an overdose even with serious consequences.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Synthetic drugs have grown steadily as a business, counting all the problems they have had, as organized crime groups have innovated their business model and modified an expansion of the methamphetamine market. They’re currently valued at S\$61.4 billion a year, according to the recent UNODC report Transnational Organized Crime in Southeast Asia.

As well as the addition of synthetic drugs, such as Ketamine and synthetic Opioids, which have been found in Southeast Asia and East Asia, raises the concern of public safety and health authorities.

Most countries are increasingly expressing concern that drug diversity, which is becoming more and more prevalent, is hampering efficient responses by law enforcement and health officials. Many officials are trying to develop solutions that can help most countries. The consumption of new substances has not yet reached the levels of methamphetamine and others emerging from mimicking other drugs with negative effects.

To work in a better environment on this issue we need to consider solutions and understand the situation that countries are going through. The programs with the most

precursors are SMART and UNODC. A timetable was announced for further analysis of synthetic drugs and also a date for a working group for law enforcement.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As stated before, drug designers and manufacturers are always going a step ahead of the law. However, there have been strategies done by different countries and organizations to put a stop to the problem of synthetic drugs. Some of them haven't been successful, but the UNODC has a strategy that might be useful when finding ways to control the issue. The UNODC Synthetic Drug Strategy for 2021-2025 is a plan made by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime. Ghada Waly, the executive director at UNODC, has stated that the UN toolkit on Synthetic stimulants developed by this organization shows practical resources that can help in the topics of forensics, health policy, legislation, and many others. The ever-changing nature of the market of synthetic drugs needs solutions that are equally as dynamic.

There are various experiences from the international community regarding the response to the previous synthetic stimulants crisis that has provided us with valuable information about what might or might not work when treating these kinds of issues.

Here are some recommendations that should be taken into account when trying to fight against this crisis:

- To build targeted and effective operational activities and directions of policy, it is necessary to have science related and research-informed processes, which might provide the knowledge needed to achieve this.
- Inter-cooperation inside agencies and offices and taking into account UNODC's legislations and strategies, as well as other ones from sister organizations and agencies across other UN systems, is an effective way of achieving the wanted responses from the public.
- understand the dynamic and adaptable market of synthetic stimulants, and once that is recognized, an agile response and monitoring should be based on that understanding.

Useful links

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/opioid-crisis/the-strategy.html>

[https://syntheticdrugs.unodc.org/uploads/syntheticdrugs/res/indexNEW\\_html/Synthetic\\_Drugs\\_Strategy\\_2021\\_09\\_23.pdf](https://syntheticdrugs.unodc.org/uploads/syntheticdrugs/res/indexNEW_html/Synthetic_Drugs_Strategy_2021_09_23.pdf)

<https://www.nysac.org/files/Synthetic%20Drugs%20White%20Paper.pdf>

<https://brookdalerecovery.com/how-dangerous-are-synthetic-drugs/>

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2019/August/solutions-to-the-growing-synthetic-drug-trade-are-advanced-at-singapore-regional-meeting.html>

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